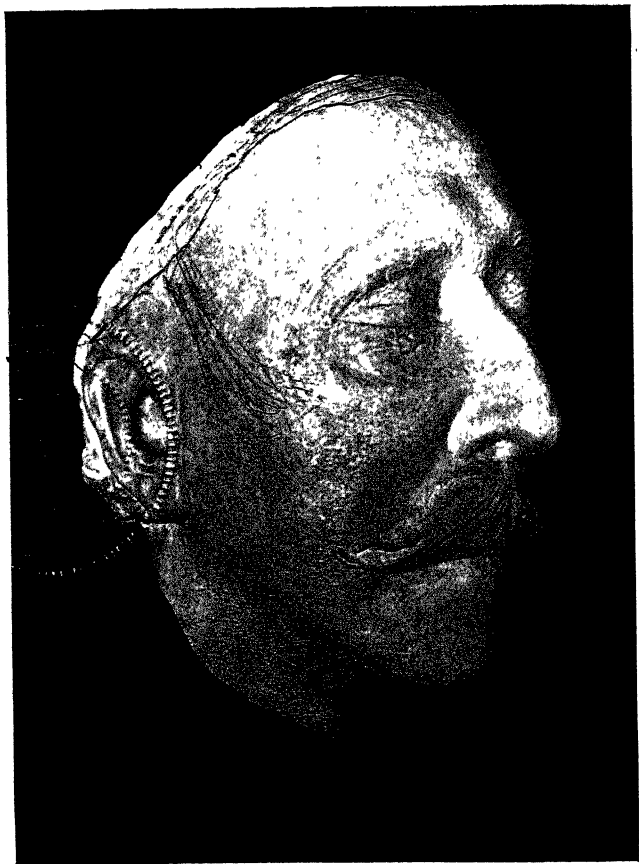


# EPITAPH ON GEORGE MOORE







GEORGE MOORE  
*Death-Mask*

CHARLES MORGAN

Epitaph on  
GEORGE MOORE

LONDON

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This essay on an artist who loved France  
is dedicated by its author to  
EDMOND JALOUX  
in friendship and admiration,  
and because an armistice, even of  
seventeen years, cannot end a  
natural alliance  
between two peoples among whom it  
is still not criminal to think.





## NOTE

I wish to express my gratitude to the artist, Professor Henry Tonks, and to the Director of the National Gallery, Millbank (The Tate Gallery), for their permission to reproduce "Saturday Evening at the Vale"; to George Moore's literary executor, Mr C. S. Medley, for allowing me to reproduce the death-mask; and, generally, to Professor Tonks, Mr Medley and many others among Moore's friends for the kindness they shewed and the help they gave me when my task was the full biography since abandoned. A few paragraphs in this essay, relating to George Moore's Irish stories and to *In Single Strictness*, have their origin in papers contributed by me to *The Times* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. I am grateful to the proprietors of *The Times* for their permission to make use of this material. My acknowledgment is due also to the Editor of *The Fortnightly Review*, in whose columns the essay appeared in abbreviated form, and to the Royal Society of Literature for their invitation to read it on 20 February 1935.

C. M.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

George Moore: Death-Mask *Frontispiece*

Saturday Evening at the Vale *facing p. 2*

*From the Painting by Henry Tonks in  
the Tate Gallery*

GEORGE MOORE was born on 24 February 1852 and died in Ebury-street on 21 January 1933. He was old and aloof; he belonged to no clique; his habit of publishing his work in limited editions had for many years restricted public knowledge of him. When he was taken to Golders Green on his way to burial in Ireland, a few great painters followed him; the Prime Minister, a Nonconformist and a Socialist, found it in his heart and in his honour to do this last duty to a pagan aristocrat who was dead; but English literature abstained. That neglect is surprising, for Moore wrote an autobiography that is entitled to rank with the *Confessions* of Rousseau, and, in his version of *Daphnis and Chloë*, a modern translation from an ancient writer which stands with Pater's and with Adlington's translation of *The Golden Ass*. His *Avowals*, however sharply one may dissent from his judgment of such men as Tolstoy to whom he was temperamentally opposed, is a landmark in the history of criticism, even what we may consider its errors having a vitality and an independence more valuable than the safer compromises of other men. All this is but a small part of

his achievement. Twice George Moore re-created the English novel—first in 1894 when *Esther Waters* gave us our liberty, and again ten years later when there began that series of tales, extending from *The Lake* through *The Brook Kerith* to *Aphrodite in Aulis*, in which we may discover, if we will, a new cadence and discipline, a new reconciliation between the written and the spoken word.

## § II

THESE are the attainments of the artist. The man was not less remarkable. Several years before his death, he invited me to study with him to be his biographer, and so appointed me in his will. Among his reasons for this was his desire that his biography should be, not a “tomb-stone in two volumes” but, as he said, “a true novel”—a story of his life based, as far as was humanly possible, upon a novelist’s complete knowledge and intuitive understanding of his subject, and told with that indifference to all but aesthetic consequence by which a storyteller is fortified. To write such a book it would be necessary for me to see him as he had seen himself at

different times of his life, “for”, he said, “the story you have to tell is not of a man who wrote this book or that; anyone can criticize my work, and better in a hundred years than now. Your story is of a man who made himself because he imagined himself, and you must discover when his imagination went with his nature and when against it; for it is that which, in the end, determines a narrative’s shape. The man you will tell of imagined himself as an artist; he went to Paris to become an artist; but when he imagined himself as a painter, the imagination was sterile, like a man mated with the wrong woman, and it was not until he threw away his brushes that his imagination paired with his nature.”

He told me that the most valuable existing source, outside his own memory and his autobiographical writings, was a certain series of letters addressed by him to a single correspondent. It would not be necessary to publish them; indeed, better not, for his letters were bad, he said; nothing that he wrote was of value unless it was revised; but without knowledge of these letters it would not be possible for me to have complete knowledge of my subject. He made me known to this correspondent and asked that access to all the letters should be permitted to me. It was

refused. I offered at once to resign my task as biographer, thinking that the refusal might be personal to me and that by my withdrawal the project itself might be saved. Moore would not permit me to resign; he asked if I was prepared to take the risk of labour wasted—a risk that he did not believe to be great. If we were patient, the decision of his correspondent would, he thought, be changed by time and by a request to be made in his will. “But if it does not change?” I asked. “Then the book you and I have imagined”, he answered, “cannot be written.”

After his death and the publication of his will, I renewed my request. It was again refused. In these circumstances, I had no alternative but to abandon the biography. Another Life of Moore is to be written, with the consent of his literary executor, by Mr Joseph Hone, who is not bound by my special and personal pledges. It was necessary that the French and Irish sources should be investigated without delay, and Mr Hone’s work has all my good will. It is, indeed, one of the purposes of this essay to make available to him a distillation of such part of my material as is not left dangerously incomplete by my ignorance of the correspondence withheld from me. I am saddened by the death of my own work, but I do not

complain of the action that has caused it. Private letters are private letters even though they be written by great men; as long as they are not destroyed against posterity, their owner's present right to withhold them is not, I think, to be questioned.

I have ventured to make this digression that none may suppose me to have lightly regarded or willingly laid aside the honour that George Moore granted to me. Several years of work have been forfeited—a forfeit that no writer pays without a struggle. I took my decision in what I believe to be fidelity to his charge that I should write no biography rather than a tentative or doubtful one. Release of the correspondence may, if it is complete, prove me to have been unduly cautious; if incomplete, it will prove nothing. Meanwhile I had no other guide than George Moore's own estimate of its biographical importance, and by this I have considered myself bound. These circumstances will explain why, in writing of him now, I shall use sometimes language more personal than would be appropriate to an essay in criticism. His work must be spoken of, for his final claim lies there, but though I shall attempt to indicate its general significance and to tell something of how it was written, I shall make no ordered

and particular analysis of it. Others may do that; the endurance of his art will assuredly give them time enough. The value of my testimony is that I knew him, day in, day out, during his last years, and in a relationship which, because I was less than half his age and so was detached from his former controversies, enabled him to speak to me sometimes "out of his part", as he might not have been able to speak even to his oldest friends.

### § III

WHAT first created a bond between us was, I think, my reply to a question of his, put to me one evening as we walked up South Eaton Place. We had been discussing Balzac and his saying (which, I see, has been restored to a different original in the latest edition of his correspondence) that he had but two desires—*être célèbre et être aimé*. Moore asked me what in life interested me most. "Once", he said, "I asked a woman that question, and she answered, 'Geology'". She had seemed a pretty woman, but after that answer our story ended before it was well begun. All husbands would be safe if they persuaded their wives



to answer, 'Geology'. But tell me," he added, "what is your answer to the question?"

I replied that three things interested me above all others: art, love and death. "Ah," he said, "that should provide us with subjects for conversation! I should ask you first why they interest you more than—shall we say flowers and horses, which are both interesting subjects."

"Because", I said, "I think of them always as three aspects of the same impulse."

"Of what impulse?"

"The impulse to re-create oneself."

"Is death that?" he said. "It would be pleasant to wake up and find that, after all, death was only art and love in a different form. You must be a very happy man, my dear friend, or a very sad one. But why do you say: 'art, love and death'? Why not: 'art, women and religion'?"

"Because", I said, "they are not the same."

"No," he answered, "they are not the same, but one must make a phrase. 'Art, love and death', sounds like a picture by Watts; one cannot go through life being interested in a picture by Watts", and, as we entered Sloane Square, he began to describe the picture that Watts might have painted.

We had this conversation before he invited me to be his biographer. I did not make my note of it while he was speaking or, even, the same night, as my later habit was; I made it some time afterwards, but I do not doubt its verbal accuracy, for, while I wrote, an image of Moore's long face, the face of a fiery sheep, turned to me under his bowler-hat while he exclaimed: "Is death that?" was fresh in my mind, and is as fresh to-day. I have often wondered since whether my speaking of man's everlasting desire to re-create himself, to die in the old self and be born again, was the cause of his having chosen me to write his Life. Like a fool, I did not ask him. Certainly I have never known a man in whom the impulse to renew himself was so strong and continuous.

#### § IV

THIS passion for self-renewal would have been the theme of the biography that I might have written. It is, I think, a universal impulse, influencing all our lives, but in him it took a peculiar form and had peculiar consequences. In men of even temperament who are

fortunate enough to have found a natural outlet for their powers, it appears as a continuous growth of their character and craftsmanship. When they become men, they put away childish things—at any rate from their active consciousness. Their advance may be likened to the ascent of a ladder; the rungs they have passed are not encountered again. A painter paints in one manner when he is twenty, in another at forty, in a third at sixty-five. The latest manner may or may not be better than the earliest—that is not the point. The point is that the change, when made, is complete and final. When the mature painter approaches a fresh canvas, he does not find that the young man of twenty is standing before it, and that, even while he is painting a mature masterpiece, this young man continually snatches his brush from him and must be disciplined anew before maturity can have its effect. This is what happened to George Moore.

The plainest and most concrete example of it is to be found in his method of composition. In his later years he worked by dictating to short-hand. The passage was typed, read by him, and, to some extent, revised with the pen. Then he would go to his secretary again and, with the typed draft on his knee,

re-dictate, not only elaborating and expanding as Balzac did in proof, but often using the draft for no more than a sentence or two and giving to his secretary, who was sometimes distracted by his drifting to and fro, what was in effect a new draft unconnected with the old. The process was then repeated, and repeated again and again, the structure of the story itself as well as the forms of expression being built up as the revisions continued. If we heard that this method was used by another writer, we should be tempted to say that his purpose was infirm, that he was garrulous merely, and that only chaos could result. It is, in fact, responsible for certain long digressions which I cannot but think were structural flaws in George Moore's later work and which gave to *Aphrodite in Aulis* an unmistakable air of having been written by a very old man. In brief, the method had its defects even under his stern control; but to say that infirmity of purpose was responsible for it is completely to misunderstand his special difficulties and his method of overcoming them. Sometimes I was able to see his very early drafts. They were a revelation of the writer and the man. They were not the imperfect beginnings of work that was recognizably a master's. A passage would open with excellent

quietness and dignity. Here, in the rough, one exclaimed, is prose as memorable as any in *The Brook Kerith*! Then, suddenly, a sentence would appear that seemed to have been interpolated by some flashy writer of novelettes for the lesser magazines of the 'eighties. These drafts could be bad with a virulent badness, with a pretentiousness, a snobbery, a sentimentality, a seemingly hopeless incompetence which, if one had not known that the genius of Moore was waiting to redeem them, would have tempted one to say that they and their writer were beyond redemption. Who wrote them? Not Homer, however disastrously he might nod. Their authorship is to be discovered in a collection of stories, one signed "George Moore", which, under the general title of *Wine, Women and Nuts*, is on the shelves of the British Museum. It is probably to be detected likewise in his contributions, which I have not investigated, to his brother, Augustus Moore's, magazine, *The Hawk*. It is to be perceived again and again in *A Modern Lover*, his first novel dated 1883, which afterwards became *Lewis Seymour and Some Women*. The astonishing and significant thing is the persistence of the unregenerate Moore. To the very end of that long life, he had to be tutored and whipped and

expurgated. He was for ever popping up, seizing the pen and writing nonsense. In every book he wrote, George Moore went through the whole process of self-renewal; he went back to the beginning and taught himself to write all over again. If for a moment his watchfulness slackened, something written not by him but by that awkward youth, his predecessor, would reach the printer—perhaps even the public. Then the book had to be re-written, and, if all re-writing failed, to be excluded from the canon.

In a preface to a final edition of *The Lake*, Moore himself speaks of this besetting adolescence:

“I will confess”, he says, “to very little admiration for *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*. The writing of *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* was useful to me inasmuch as that if I had not written them I could not have written *The Lake* or *The Brook Kerith*. It seems ungrateful, therefore, to refuse to allow two of my most successful books into the canon merely because they do not correspond with my aestheticism. But a writer’s aestheticism is his all; he cannot surrender it, for his art is dependent upon it, and the single concession he can make is that if an overwhelming demand should arise for these books when he is among the gone—a storm before which the reed must bend—the publisher shall be permitted to print *Evelyn*

*Innes* and *Sister Teresa* from the original editions it, being, however, clearly understood that they are offered to the public only as apocrypha. But this permission must not be understood to extend to certain books on which my name appears—viz., *Mike Fletcher*, *Vain Fortune*, *Parnell and His Island*; to some plays, *Martin Luther*, *The Strike at Arlingford*, *The Bending of the Bough*; to a couple of volumes of verse entitled *Pagan Poems* and *Flowers of Passion*—all these books, if they are ever reprinted again, should be issued as the work of a disciple—Amico Moorini I put forward as a suggestion.”

Amico Moorini, then, shall be his name, but he was very far from being George Moore's disciple or his friend. He was his enemy who, though beaten down a thousand times, always rose up from under his feet; and it was this struggle which gave to Moore's character the stress of an extreme complexity.

## § V

IN some respects, George Moore was still an adolescent even in his old age; in some, a figure in comedy that swung continually towards farce; but in his devotion to his art, and his readiness to sacrifice all else to it, he was saint or devil, according

to your prejudice. To study him and his work was to be instructed in the innermost meaning and penalties of self-discipline and self-creation. Self-creation was the end, self-discipline the means, and the penalty he had to pay for this everlasting labour of the spirit, compelling the man he had been to bring forth the man he would become, was an exhaustion of the vital energy given by others to the joy, the ease, the warmth, the natural humanity of living. It was precisely this that caused so many acquaintances to feel that there was in him something chill and snakelike; they knew him only when he was on his guard, when Amico Moorini was at his elbow. The limp hand, the sloping shoulders, the pale, almost creaseless face, the eyes that were sometimes vacant and sometimes the eyes of a hawk, filled many observers with profound unease. There were times in which they felt that he was naturally cruel; they experienced a physical repulsion; and, as though they were engaged with a creature not of their own kind, were reluctant that his hand should touch theirs. It needed more than superficial knowledge of him to understand that his cruelty was for himself.

Impressions of this sort always have their date in his middle or later life, never in his youth. They appear



in contemporary accounts of him after his writing of *Esther Waters* and generally later still, when he had passed his fiftieth year and had written *The Lake* and that volume so significantly named: *Memoirs of My Dead Life*. Amico Moorini himself appears to have been by no means a repulsive young man. One who knew Moore when he was young and remained his friend until her death a few years ago said that, though ugly, he was always "exciting and amusing". Mr Shaw, who knew him in his very early days in London, described him to me in a conversation of which I have a note containing this illuminating passage:

Shaw said he knew Moore when he lived in Cecil Street, Strand. He seldom, if ever, saw George and Augustus together. "There was always a certain delicacy about George and he knew how to be a gentleman when he wanted to. He was always telling stories about himself and women. In every story there was a room full of mirrors and chandeliers, and the story usually ended with some woman throwing a lamp at George and driving him out of the house. Everybody used to laugh at George and no one believed him, but he had an imperturbable good humour and if you said: 'But, George, don't talk such nonsense, you are making it all up', he was not in the

least put out or angry but just said: 'Don't interrupt me', and went on as before."

Shaw added that, after this early knowledge of Moore, he lost sight of him for a time, "until one day Archer came to me and said he had been reading a most wonderful naturalistic book by a new writer. It was called *A Mummer's Wife*. 'But who is the writer?' I asked. 'Well,' said Archer, 'his name is George Moore.' 'Nonsense!' I said. 'But I *know* George Moore. He couldn't possibly write a real book. He couldn't possibly *do* anything.' But there it was. He had written it, and then I began to understand the incredible industry of the man."

This was in 1884, ten years before the publication of *Esther Waters*, Moore being then thirty-two. Mr Shaw speaks of his "imperturbable good humour". The general impression is of a foolish, rather flashy man about town, an affable and outwardly ineffectual creature who in solitude only was beginning to lay the foundations of his artistic life. There is no hint here of anything abnormally cold or aloof, still less of a cultivated inhumanity; and I do not doubt that the contemporary impression is just.

Contrast with it an account, by Mr Ford Madox Ford, of a meeting with George Moore in his maturity. It appeared in an essay on Moore and

Galsworthy contributed by Mr Ford to *The Atlantic Monthly* soon after their deaths.

I have that early image of him (Mr Ford writes), standing rather rigid and grim, chilled and monachal in his long dressing-gown. He was dismissing me with one hand on the door-knob of his dim, overheated room. I had at the moment for the first time the impression of his extreme pallor. That was owing, possibly, to a shaft of light coming from the passage. And he seemed as aloof as if he had been a denizen of another world where there was neither sun nor wind. The impression was so strong that I was relieved that he did not remove his hand from the door knob and offer it to me.

Mr Ford hazards the opinion that it was, perhaps, George Moore's aloofness from life that led to his being so often omitted from critical discussion, although there was not a critic "with any pretensions to knowledge of letters who would not acknowledge when challenged that Moore was infinitely the most skilful man of letters of his day—the most skilful in the whole world". Then Mr Ford describes how a friend of his, speaking of Galsworthy, said:

"He wasn't, at least, wicked like George Moore. . . ." Then he checked and exclaimed almost in mental distress: "I don't know why I say that George Moore

was wicked. I know nothing against him personally. I have never heard anything against him, and *The Brook Kerith* is one of the most beautiful books in the world. But you know what I mean....” I knew what he meant (Mr Ford continues). It was that something wicked seemed to distil itself from the pages of Moore’s books so that whilst you read them you felt, precisely, mental distress. You felt even mentally distressed at merely remembering the writings of George Moore—as if you were making acquaintance of what goes on in the mind behind the glacial gaze of the serpent that is the Enemy of Man.

Mr Ford’s choice of words is, perhaps, over-spectacular. Certainly I was never aware in George Moore of anything that could be appropriately described as “the glacial gaze of the serpent that is the Enemy of Man”: he was too often pathetic and too often ridiculous for that. Nor can anyone who knew Moore intimately do anything but smile at the use of the word “wicked” in connexion with him. He could be as wilful as a child and as impatient as a shrew. I have seen him march into a chemist’s shop where he was unknown, and, regardless of five customers waiting to be served, cry out from the door: “I want something to make me sleep.” Everyone yielded place to him; he took his bottle and

marched out, as if this were a shop in Ballyglass and he still owner of Moore Hall. What other people's feelings might be, he did not consider when he wanted something; it was not cruelty or vanity or even selfishness; it was a kind of imperious oblivion. He could be, on occasions, so absorbed by his own interests that for the sake of a phrase or a whim he could wound his oldest friends to the heart. To be his biographer and thus to be brought into contact with many whose friendship he had destroyed was to realize how terrible a desert he had made of his personal life. He had a few loyal friends of long standing, but even to them there was no assurance of friendship's natural peace. At any moment he might say or do something so unreasonable, so fiercely intolerant, that only a fixed determination to treat such outbursts as if they had not been could preserve a friendship of forty or fifty years. I myself was so much younger than he that what a man of his own generation was bound in self-respect to challenge I could conveniently disregard; but I have heard him so belabour an old friend for no worse crime than a defence of Keats that the whole friendship was imperilled and might have been broken irreparably if that friend, himself an artist, had not leaned back in his chair at dinner and said: "Well,

Morgan, you continue the conversation, and, when Moore has finished talking about Keats, I will rejoin you." The effect was magical. As always when Moore perceived that he had been at his worst, he bestirred himself to be at his best. He would not apologize, but he had a miraculous gift for the prolongation of sentences, and the sentence which had been begun in rage against Keats was led on, with a forced smile and a slow waving of the hand, by a painful and devious route until at last, emerging from the tunnel of unreason, it found itself in the eager sunlight of the French Impressionists. What a sentence! What skill, what swift and iron self-discipline had made it possible! The younger man whom Shaw knew long ago, wilful, flashy, wrong-headed, vulgar, the unregenerate Moore who never outgrew the tantrums of adolescence, had looked up over the edge of the dinner table, had behaved like a fool and, in the course of a single sentence, been crushed by a genius.

This invasion of his new by his dead life was perpetual in George Moore, for the truth is that his dead life would not stay in the grave. He was engaged in everlasting conflict with it, not as man only, but as writer. The history of this battle is to be read throughout his works, and, above all, in his re-writing of





*Tate Gallery*

SATURDAY EVENING AT THE VALE

*From the painting by Professor Henry Tonks*



them. Those who imagine that these re-writings were governed by a desire to give a new twist to an anecdote or to fiddle with the turn of a sentence mistake their man. Nothing is more wearisome to an imaginative writer than to take up again old work written in a mood long since passed away; and nothing is more dangerous. It is better to let the work stand or to suppress it. Moore did suppress a great part of his work. *Mike Fletcher* and *Vain Fortune*, by no means juvenilia, for they were written after *The Confessions of a Young Man* and appeared between his thirty-third and thirty-fifth years, have vanished utterly. *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*, though in print, were for him under a cloud; they were a subject repugnant to him, for here, he felt, even revision had failed; and these two books were written not in his thirties but in his late forties, long after *Esther Waters*. They mark a relapse between that masterpiece and the final struggle to re-create himself which began in his going to Ireland at the time of the Boer War and resulted instantly in *The Untilled Field* and *The Lake*.

His literary history, pointing to that date, is of special significance. He had written one very good novel, *A Mummer's Wife*, at the age of thirty-two. At thirty-six, he had produced his first immature but

original essay in autobiography, a hint, so to speak, of the life to come, but not in itself of much value as a work of art. Then for six years he had done pale, tentative work, with no greater merit than is to be found in the charm of *Spring Days*, until suddenly real boldness, real genius emerged in *Esther Waters*. Then came another period of stumbling until, at the age of fifty-one, he published *The Untilled Field* and stumbled no more.

The year 1903, which brought this volume of stories with their evident debt to Turgenev, and the year 1905 in which *The Lake* was published, are of particular importance in Moore's history. These two books, linked by unity of impulse and circumstance, would, in their final edition, have been printed in a single volume if that volume had not threatened to be unwieldy, and he retained always a special liking for them; they were a key that had opened to him a new artistic life.

When he returned to Ireland *Esther Waters* was far behind. Years had followed without producing anything comparable with it. He had put its style from him, for in that medium he had said what he had to say, and he was seeking now, as he always did, not to repeat but to re-create himself. In *Evelyn Innes* he

had faltered, and knew it. His advance, his endless process of self-teaching, was checked. This, even more than the distaste for England that the Boer War had occasioned in him or the wild project of founding a new literature in Erse, sent him to Dublin. He half-believed at the time that he was an apostle of a Celtic renaissance; but he went to Ireland intuitively, as he did all things, for the sake of his art; he went to renew not Ireland but himself, and *The Untilled Field* was the firstfruit of that renewal.

The edition of 1931 and later editions of this collection of tales contain an interesting example of Moore's revision—interesting because it fails, and fails for a reason very rare in Moore. Unlike his great acts of re-writing, it was not the outcome of his struggle to subdue Amico Moorini; it was a mechanical revision, an attempt to build a new tale, *Fugitives*, on the ruins of two others, *In the Clay* and *The Way Back*, which had appeared in the volume of 1903, and which he seemingly lacked the courage altogether to reject. *Fugitives* is one of his few unsuccessful revisions, there being a perceptible strain in the linking together of its two parts—an anecdote of a sculptor and his model in Ireland, and the discovery, during a conversation in “one of the upholstered

recesses" of the Criterion bar, that Lucy ran away from home, tried to go on the stage, but was taken back to Ireland to be married to a mathematical instrument maker. The subject is not a good one, and the tentative reversion to naturalism of treatment—

"Nobody is likely to interrupt us here", said Rodney, and he charged Carmady to put a name upon it.

—is not fortunate. Moore of *A Mummer's Wife* would have hit upon the tippler's catchword: "What's yours?" Moore, running true to his later manner, would have circumvented the difficult preliminaries of the bar-room. The compromise is unhappy, but it serves well to throw into relief the extraordinary vigour and sureness of the other stories, *The Wild Goose* or *The Exile* or *Julia Cahill's Curse*. In *Almsgiving* is a passage that already disproves what had begun to be said since *Evelyn Innes*—that Moore was slow in action.

"Down with your hands, sir, down with your hands, sir," she cried, but before he had time to let her slap him, she said, "I will give you enough of bees", and she caught one that had just rested on a flower and put it down his neck. The bee stung him in the neck where the flesh is softest, and he ran away

screaming, unable to rid himself of the bee. He broke through the hedges of sweet pea, and he dashed through the poppies, trampling through the flower beds, until he reached the dry ditch.

They are beautiful stories, rich in natural humour, free of the false emphasis that too often reduces a short story to a trick; they have the air, which was to be the mark of all that was best in Moore's later work, of being governed by the people themselves, not by the writer. They are not his puppets; they do not obey him or illustrate any moral of his; and their adventures are being told, for the first time in English, with that ordered simplicity, that idealization of the rhythms of the speaking voice, which was the prose instrument that Moore invented and perfected. We see him here exchanging the literary approach to narrative for that of a *raconteur*, and from this book onwards may follow the development of his peculiar method. *The Lake*, which was continually re-written and continually simplified, is an almost flawless instance of the application of that method to a longer and more complex narrative than any contained in *The Untilled Field*, and already modifications have begun to appear in it. A *raconteur* would have begun at the beginning of the priest's tale, but Moore, desiring to preserve in

the lake itself a strict unity of scene, was driven, after many experiments, to use for opening an elaborate retrospect, a task of infinite difficulty to him, who, being no comfortable grammarian, shrank from the troubles of the English pluperfect. The difficulty was brilliantly overcome. The story reads "like milk". It has indeed a seeming ease, and is governed by a rule against divagation, which make of it the pleasantest of all introductions to Moore's work.

There is more than the customary ups-and-downs of a literary life in the long struggle that preceded *The Lake* and *The Untilled Field*. The ebb and flow of Moore's power up to that time and the unending battle of revision that he was compelled to fight even when he had achieved full maturity represent the success and failure of a process of exorcism. His rewritings will be found upon examination to have had one dominating purpose: to silence the voice and eliminate the follies of the young man whom Shaw knew and who was still lively enough, when George Moore was in his eightieth year, to appear at the dinner table on the evening I have described.

There are several other indications that Moore was, in a special sense, haunted by this embarrassing spectre of his own youth and that, in face of it, the battle of

self-creation had to be fought anew each day he lived. Not only did he continually re-write his old books but he had an abiding desire to re-write his former life, to re-write it in his mind and soul. Perhaps it was for this reason that he could break so callously with his old friends and that, when one of them came to visit him, he could refuse her admittance, crying out to his servant so that the visitor herself could not but hear: "No! No! She is too old! She is too old!" He had, perhaps, been engaged that day in a more than usually fierce battle with Amico Moorini, whose ally, because she was his contemporary, that visitor seemed to be.

## § VI

IT will have been noticed that Mr Ford, in the passage I have quoted, says that, in reading Moore's books, "you feel, precisely, mental distress". There is, I think, a measure of truth in this, for I experience sometimes, while reading even the masterpieces, a sense of strain, of enforced calm, powerful enough to enable me to understand a deeper unease in others. It would be easy to dismiss

such objections as aesthetically irrelevant and the objectors as obtuse. More is to be gained by facing the objection, and enquiring how much of it is critically spurious and how much valid.

What is the element in Moore that causes many readers, who are by no means without equipment to appreciate his mastery of his craft, to shrink from his work? Why has the general public never taken to itself a writer of so much wit, so keen an invention, whose stories, far from being "difficult" or obscure, have a lucidity unparalleled in modern English? A part of the answer, a part that is of no critical importance, may be conveniently summarized in the saying, which I have heard a thousand times, that George Moore was what the English call "French". To speak of a woman as if she were a goddess—that, in England, is pardonable, that is romantic, no matter how the goddess may behave; to speak of her as a doll inseparable from her garments—that, too, is permissible, having polite precedents in Thackeray, *malgré lui*; to speak of her as if she were a square meal is a practice that the heartier English will always approve for what they are pleased to call its "honesty"; but to see her with the eye of a connoisseur—ah, no! that is "French". And Moore saw everything with



the eye of a connoisseur—not women only, but trees. He admired the ilex “because”, he said, “there is an antique beauty in this tree that we find in none other; . . . and if it were possible to carve statues of trees, I am sure that the ilex is the tree sculptors would choose”. For reasons in the same aesthetic kind he admired Doris who was his companion under the ilex. “To justify my desire for her lips I began to compare her beauty with that of a Greek head on a vase, saying that hers was a cameo-like beauty, as dainty as any Tanagra figure.” The passage is not among the writer’s best—a little too solemn, too elaborately orchestrated—and I quote it not in proof of his merit but to suggest what precisely it is in his work that has caused many to turn from it. It is not that it is sensual, but that, where it is sensual at all, its sensuality is felt to be cold. “To justify my desire for her lips” is among Amico Moorini’s most damaging phrases.

“Lovers”, he says elsewhere, “are divided into two kinds, the babbling and the silent. We meet specimens of the silent kind on a Thames back-water—the punt drawn up under the shady bank with the twain lying side by side, their arms about each other all the afternoon. When evening comes and it is time to return home, her fellow gets out the sculls,

and they part saying, 'Well, dear, next Sunday, at the same time'. 'Yes, at the same time next Sunday.' We were of the babbling kind, as the small part of our conversation that appears in this story shows." The sterner English gentlemen declare in self-protection that George Moore babbles too much. Susan Mitchell complains that he is "passionless" and repeats with relish the famous *mot* that Moore was a man who told but did not kiss. Thus are the armies of virtue or disappointment arrayed against him; and at the head of the army is the English lady of polite tradition who, while she by no means objects to a little babbling, is embarrassed to be taken down and turned about as if she were a Greek vase. She fears, perhaps, that beauty accepted in so critical a spirit may too conveniently be returned to its shelf.

There are, indeed, many objections to the passage I have quoted—not the least, or the least surprising, of which is that the writer of it, who would spend a week in search of the precise word, allowed the "fellow" in the punt to use sculls instead of paddles. It will be a relief to those who feel on whatever ground that Moore was babbling too much to know that, in this instance, the words complained of were written by Amico Moorini and that George Moore himself con-

demned them. The skulls, the Greek head and the Tanagra figure have all gone. The whole passage, having survived for more than twenty years, was cut in the eleventh edition of April 1928.

## § VII

**T**HIS idea that Moore's sensual passages have a forbidding chill—is it not to express in different terms another idea: that they were at their best free of sentimentality? He was by no means without sentiment, if by the word we mean a just tenderness and that pity for men and women which springs from perception of the difference between what they are and what they dream themselves to be. *Esther Waters*, his realistic masterpiece, is informed by sentiment of this integrity; but sensuality is its antithesis. To mingle the two is to produce a debased sentimentality and Moore did not mingle them. But Amico Moorini did, and there we arrive again at the core of the problem.

George Moore, the mature master, when writing independently and at his ease, could be shocking to prudes, but never to discerning and intelligent men;

his so-called improprieties had a kind of fabulous simplicity—for example in the lovely early chapters of Héloïse's girlhood—that protects them from attack. It is only when Amico Moorini takes up the pen, as he does sometimes in *A Story-Teller's Holiday* and in detached sentences throughout the novels, that a false sensuality, springing, in most instances, from an adolescent desire to shock, breaks the evenness of the narrative surface. Moore knew well enough that there was within him an immature tendency to this extravagance. To be saved from it, to keep Amico Moorini within the bonds of discipline, he imposed upon himself a rule that is a key to his later style. It was a rule of evenness, a rule against emotional emphasis, a refusal not only of anything that could be called a purple patch but of any conspicuous variation of *tempo* in response to a variation of mood. The result was a classical repose that is delightful among the fevers of contemporary romance. The narrative moves forward like a clear river under a calm sky. The image mirrored in its surface is dissolved and succeeded by another without perceptible transition; the light upon it changes its appearance from gaiety to sadness and from sadness to a profound, brooding melancholy; it responds with exquisite modulations

of colour to the day's mood and hour. But it remains a steady, calm, unhurrying river; nothing, not even passion, is allowed to break its surface except on the unfortunate occasions when Amico Moorini, escaping from his tutor, tosses in a stone.

An example of the discretion and binding power of Moore's later style is the volume called *In Single Strictness* which, with acknowledgment of its origin in *Celibates*, appeared in a limited edition in 1922. The subject of the tales contained in it is one of extreme difficulty and it is worth while to examine with care Moore's treatment of it.

Hugh Monfert, whose celibacy is the subject of the longest of these five stories, says of the Middle Ages: "I seem to have known them always, and I never can altogether surrender the belief that I am but the shadow of a knight who lived eight hundred years ago", and, in the course of the same discussion imagining himself as "a knight riding in the lists, and of all, practising chastity", he declares that chastity has always been the centre of his thoughts.

At this time, it is clear, his conception of chastity was absolute, there being in his mind no anticipation of the motive which, a few months later, caused him to turn instantly from the girl he married. Beatrice

was the sister of Hugh's friend, and, in the event, it was no absolute chastity in himself, but the realization that he was "attracted to Beatrice not for herself but for her likeness to her brother", which compelled him to break off his honeymoon and obtain annulment of his marriage. Percy, the girl's brother, though never aware of his personal responsibility, had early perceived a contradiction in Hugh's medievalism. "What I find it difficult to understand", he had said, "is your admiration for the Greeks and for the Middle Ages, two things so opposite", and it was the Greek and Roman precedent that Hugh afterwards pleaded in extenuation to Beatrice's father. It is a contradiction which lies at the root of the story, giving significance to Hugh's remoteness from all creative life, and lending to his tragedy the unique terror of spiritual isolation. "He would have to look forward to a life of restraint; and he asked himself if there was anything worse, a slow, burning torture for years to come. Yet he did not wish himself different from what he was." He is free of rebellion, unmarred by any colour of corruption, arousing none of the revulsion which is commonly provoked by those subject to his temptation, because he appears, not as a social pariah whose mind is twisted by physical

influences, but as a man spiritually exiled from his age.

Moore claimed, in his Advertisement, that the temperaments of the people in these stories were so closely related that the book might be considered "as a single narrative divided into five chapters". Whether the tale is of Wilfrid Holmes, who, when asked to produce the accompaniments of his opera, was forced to answer, "But they are not written, only the top line", or of the parlour-maid, Sarah Gwynn, who denied herself marriage in order that, withdrawn to a convent, she might pray for the man and woman who had once made it possible for her to avoid prostitution, or of Hugh Monfert himself, the dominant melody goes unchanged. As a bud, seemingly perfect, may yet be incapable of response to the sun's warmth and remain always folded, so these protagonists want a single quality to give effect to their latent powers. Without it, they are withdrawn from human perspective, and have not completeness before the world; yet, if it had been added to them, the qualities to which it might have been complementary would themselves have been changed, and Hugh and Etta and Sarah would have become, not themselves made perfect, but beings as

different from their former selves as a flower is from its bud. "I'd think of him ready enough if it wasn't for my prayers", Sarah explains, and though, for her, celibacy has become a condition of duty, while to Etta Marr it appears as a condition of vanity and to Hugh as conditional to the restraint of love for Beatrice's brother, yet in all of them there is the same attitude of withdrawal, the same pride in solitude, the same air of wandering in a vast house, strange and empty, wherein there is no service they may perform nor any mirror which, for an instant, however fleeting, will accept their images.

The remaining story, of Priscilla and Emily Lofft, is, in many respects, the most beautiful. It contains no overwhelming flash of insight such as that which makes the scene at Etta Marr's death-bed as lovely and terrible as the silence of lightning, but it proceeds with gentler movement than its companions, and there is gathered up in it that quietness, that sense of passing unscathed through many torments, which is the distinguishing quality of them all.

In the continuous and deliberate calm of this and of all his mature work, there is something spell-bound and trancelike. His detractors call it monotonous, frozen, dead. To me it is a calm enforced; I am aware



in every line of the exercise of a rigid discipline; but it is a discipline which, though it touches me sometimes with unease, for I cannot escape knowledge of the struggle that produced it, fills me also with admiration and excitement. Here, plainly, at whatever cost to Moore himself, is something new in English literature that will have a lasting influence precisely because it is not new in the sense of being without roots. It will have a future because it has a past. Three great influences are perceptible in it: the majestic austerity of Landor; the translucence of Turgeniev, whose stories are shaded by none of the mists that trouble other men; and Pater's doctrine that sensation is the touchstone of value, a doctrine which Moore, having less moral prejudice than the author of *Marius*, was able to accept more fully than Pater himself. Moore made no greater secret of these influences than he did of the earlier influence of Flaubert. His claim was that he had assimilated them, and the claim is just. Landor and Pater were not, in essence, novelists; Turgeniev was not an English novelist; and Moore had evolved a style through which all three were made contributors to the English novel. He called them in as allies against Amico Moorini, and *Héloise and Abélard*

was the result. "There are only two prose epics in the English language", Moore would say. "One is *The Brook Kerith*."

"And what is the other?" you were expected to ask.

"The other", he would reply, "is *Héloïse and Abélard*."

## § VIII

THERE is a passage in which Héloïse questions Abélard on the subject of the relation between sensuality and love. Nothing he has written reveals Moore as clearly as this dialogue—his eagerness for the concrete, his rejection of transcendentalism in all its forms. Héloïse, alarmed by the detachment of Abélard's admiration for her physical beauty, asks, in effect, whether this is all he cares about. Once he had cared for her mind. "Dost thou think of me differently now?" she inquires. How easily an adoring lover might have turned that question aside, but Abélard, with Moore's own frankness, puts himself into his answer. "Not so differently, Héloïse, that I have forgotten thy soul. But can we think of the soul and body at the same time? When

thou comest to me, the lamp held high, to learn all the sports of love from me, thou wilt not think of my soul—not then—but of thy pleasure, as I shall think of mine. Yet let it not be said that the soul and the intellect of the woman is forgotten by the man, though he cannot love body and soul at the same time.”

I had a long conversation with Moore on this passage. He said that, if allowances were made for differences of phrase, it represented his own view and certainly his experience. I asked him if Abélard's distinction was not too rigid, if the soul was not to be loved in the body. “You will be asking me next”, he replied, “to affirm the doctrine of Transubstantiation....But tell me,” he added, “what do you mean—that the soul may be loved in the body? That is a mystical saying and mystical sayings have a way of defeating themselves if one examines them a little.” I answered that the emotion of love, if it was to be distinguished at all from desire, was to be distinguished first as a particular emotion, directed towards the one person beloved, whereas desire was a general emotion requiring only the stimulus of physical beauty. Yet desire itself was particularized by love and directed by it towards the loved one, not

because she was more beautiful than others but because her self was manifest in her body. Moore said: "Think of the eyes. Do you say that the soul appears in the eyes? If so, it must disappear when the eyes are shut. Perhaps you are right, but we shall not decide by argument whether you are right or wrong. Nothing can decide except the scene itself. Imagine the scene and your pen will write down the answer. Perhaps Abélard would have decided in your favour. If, when Héloïse came to him carrying the lamp, her eyes had been shut, he would have said: 'Héloïse, open your eyes', and have looked into them, searching for her. At any rate", he added, "Abélard would have done so, if he had thought of it, whatever his views about the body and the soul, for nothing would have so delighted Héloïse. She would have asked what he was looking for and if he had answered: 'For thy soul!' the earlier conversation would have been reversed. She would have said: 'Is there naught but my soul?' and they would have begun to argue fruitlessly as people always do whenever the soul is mentioned. But soon", he added, "they would have grown tired of conversation."

“**T**HEY would have begun to argue fruitlessly as people always do whenever the soul is mentioned”, Moore said—a saying remarkable in the man who wrote continually on religious themes, who made a pilgrimage to Palestine that he might prepare himself for *The Brook Kerith*, and who loved Shelley above all poets.

Susan Mitchell, whose book is perceptive of his worldliness but in other respects is shut in by a provincial blindness, says roundly that Moore was “unspiritual”. It is a perilous word to fling at a great artist. No man is unspiritual who is fanatically dedicated, as Moore was, to an unmaterial end—to the pursuit of an abstract perfection; and no man is unspiritual who could write *The Brook Kerith* and *The Passing of the Essenes*. But it is significant that for him Paul was the hero of the New Testament; that of all Shelley’s poems it was *The Sensitive Plant* that fascinated him in his childhood and commanded his loyalty in old age; and that argument concerning the soul appeared to him fruitless.

There are here seeming contradictions that cannot be reconciled except by saying, what I am sure is

true, that no man with so great an interest in certain aspects of religion has ever been so little metaphysical. This was his limitation, but it was his genius to turn his limitations to account, and the fact that he was unmetaphysical, that he was indeed incapacitated not by intellectual failure but by irresistible boredom from abstract speculation, became in him a source of strength.

There is an anthology of his choosing called *Pure Poetry*, a rare volume and an illuminating one. In the preface he tells how in his youth he was bored by *Marmion*, how between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one he read most of the English poets; "and when I was twenty-five", he adds, "my love of poetry began to wilt in *Les Orientales*, *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, *Les Contemplations*; and *La Légende des Siècles* carried with it the dismal conviction that I had lost my taste for poetry. Something has broken in me, I said; can it be else, for here is beautiful poetry and I can distinguish in it no more than sonorous versification." Then he reaches his climax. "Balzac opened a new world for me, a world of things, and in Balzac I found a poem so beautiful that I began to think that perhaps my love of poetry was not as dead as I thought it was." And after speaking of Gautier and Villon and Belleau,

he says: "And the reason may be stated why we are in these poems at the heart of poetry: because these poems were born of admiration of the only permanent world, the world of things"; and he proceeds to argue that "ideas, thoughts, reflections, become common quickly; an idea is mine to-day, yours to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow is on the barrel organs. Every ten years", he adds, "morality, patriotism, duty and religion, take on meanings different from those they wore before."

The argument is fallacious, for while it is true that moral ideas change and are, therefore, less enduring subjects of poetry than the moon and stars, it is wrong to suppose, as Moore seemingly did in this instance, that all ideas are didactic or that religion consists in morals. "Pure poetry" for Moore was the poetry of concrete things, knowledge of which is received directly through the senses. I do not wish here to criticize his anthology. It is enough to point out that six poems by Edgar Allan Poe are included in it and not one by any seventeenth-century mystic, unless Milton's *Sweet Echo* and *On May Morning* or Marvell's *Nymph Complaining* may by some miracle be allowed to represent them. What emerges is that Moore did not know that such a line as: "I saw

Eternity the other night” was poetry. For him poetry was about enduring things and sensations. To see eternity was not to see with the same eyes that saw William Morris’s

“Gold wings across the sea!  
Grey light from tree to tree,  
Gold hair beside my knee”

and, therefore, to see eternity was not to see at all. In any case, eternity itself was not a thing, and so not “permanent” enough to be a subject of “pure poetry”.

Happily it was only Amico Moorini who tried to write verses and he desisted about the same time that he threw his charcoal away, leaving George Moore, with his unfailing intuition, to apply his poetic theory in the one practice where it could at that time be usefully applied: the practice of naturalistic storytelling. If Moore had had a speculative mind, he could not have written *A Mummer’s Wife* or *Esther Waters*. If he had had mystical apprehension, he would not have written *The Brook Kerith*. But he was not unspiritual; he had many of the qualities of a saint, though not of a saint adhering to any Church. He was at first a naturalist of the French naturalistic school; then a realist whose realism was strengthened



and intensified, on the earthly plane, by the fact that it did not strive to penetrate beyond that aspect of things which lies within reach of the sensuous, as distinct from the apprehensive, intellect; but he was very far from being a materialist as man or as artist.

## § X

HIS critics are fond of saying that, if Moore lives, he will live by his style. He himself was a little weary of being praised for his style. "Style?" he said. "They haven't read Landor", and, though this was probably no more than an expression of the desire, which every writer has, to be praised for some quality the praises of which have not grown stale, it is worth recording that Moore's especial pride was in his power to invent anecdote. He was aware that his later narrative method was made perilous by its smoothness; at the same time he was determined that this smoothness must at all costs be preserved, for, if it were not, his whole purpose would be defeated, Amico Moorini would be given a chance to intrude his extravagances, and an element

of fashion would appear in his prose. To be fashionable was what Moore did not desire, for to be fashionable to-day is to be unfashionable to-morrow, and his aim was to write a prose independent of every colloquialism, every trick of phrase, every contemporary allusion that might make it obscure or tedious in the future. He carried this quest of an absolute prose so far that he rejected where he could, and sought occasion to reject, the use of the second person plural, feeling that this use of verb and pronoun was rubbed, and that "thou" and "thee" and "thine" had the double merit of freshness to-day and of an unshakable establishment in the Bible. But he knew that this smoothness laid a weight on narrative; after many pages the reader might turn from it, seeking stronger contrast, richer variety, more abundant vigour than was to be found in these intertwining cadences, unless by anecdote he was led on from page to page. He had been greatly troubled, while writing *Héloïse and Abélard*, by the necessity, which he had seen no means to avoid, of discussing Nominalism and Realism, and he would tell me often of the pride he had had in inventing anecdotes which should sustain the narrative beneath the burden of so much philosophy. To him his anecdotes were windows in

the corridor of narrative and exposition. They were the light by which the journey was to be made; and to think of his style as if it consisted only in a faultless control of phrase and cadence is to deny him his place in literature. Good English, however good it may be, will gain no man immortality, and we shall arrive at the significance of Moore only by recognizing the validity of his claim to be a master of anecdote and by perceiving to what conclusion it leads us. The conclusion is, I think, that Moore desired above all else to evolve a new method of story-telling. He used to say that he had introduced "the aesthetic novel" into England. This is true, but the phrase was not fortunately chosen; it expresses only a part of the truth and, at the same time, obscures it, for to many minds the word "aesthetic" suggests the beauty of contrivance, not that perfect marriage of form with purpose which was Moore's understanding of it. He saw round him, and might still see if he were alive, the English novel struggling beneath a burden of literary convention. The uses of dialogue, the means employed to pass from dialogue to narrative and back again, the methods of communicating retrospect, had all stiffened. In the work of unskilled writers, each transition was a jerk, and, even though by skill and

experience the jerks might be concealed, one remained aware that the narrative planes were being shifted; there was a momentary break of illusion when the author ended his trickle of dialogue, to which the reader had been listening as one mortal listens to another, and plunged into the thought-stream which a reader cannot enter except on the basis of his being an omniscient god. This passing from plane to plane is one of the everlasting difficulties of a novelist. A thousand different ways of avoiding it have been invented. The whole story may be told in the first person, thus excluding the novelist's voice altogether and forcing the reader to identify himself with the imagined narrator. Or the story may be told in the third person, but still consistently from the point of view of one character in it—a method subject to many of the limitations of first-person narrative and lacking its intimacy, but free also of its egoism. Or there is another method, chosen by many writers in recent years—that of avoiding emphasis on major transitions by multiplying minor transitions. The reader is carried forward at so high a speed over so rough a track that he has no time to notice the changes of plane from subjective to objective narrative. Of this method there have been brilliant instances, parti-

cularly in America. Mr William Faulkner's sentences have the crackle and vitality of machine-gun fire; his changes of narrative plane are so many, so swift, so violent that, by breaking continuity into a thousand pieces, he achieves a coherent pattern. But successful though it may be in short stories, this method is perilous in its application to epic narrative. Either the noise becomes deafening and the reader intuitively closes his ears against it; or, in authors whose irregularity of style is quieter, there is a gradual failure of lucidity, the reader searching in vain for the bread of plain statement among the high and mixed flavours of impressionism. It is not necessary to multiply instances of the attempts that have been made to give unity to fictitious narrative; the point is that, until Moore's coming, they were literary experiments based upon elaborate investigation of the written word.

From this Moore broke free. He had an extraordinary capacity for observing the simple truths that other men pass by. He had the kind of intelligence that might have invented adhesive postage-stamps or, in a yet more ancient world, have prompted him to exclaim to the men who were dragging a sledge: "Why not put the thing on wheels?" And he

observed, in his study of narrative, that when one reads it in a book one is much more acutely conscious of its transitions, its interpolated retrospects, its struggling movements from one consciousness to another than one is in listening to a story that is told orally. A child always prefers a good tale invented at its bedside to a tale, greatly superior in order and substance, that is read from a book; and Moore had the genius to perceive that the modern English novel, even the naturalistic novel that he formerly practised, had become too far removed from its origin in fables passed down by word of mouth. A lesser man, making this discovery, might have been tempted by it into banal simplicities and an insane, retrogressive abandonment of tradition. Moore set himself to apply the virtues of oral narrative to the rich and complex language he had inherited from the past. The results are most conspicuous in those parts of his style—we may call them mannerisms if we will—that caricaturists love to reproduce.

And thinking that William must by now have boiled the egg, have you boiled the egg? he cried, but no answer came through the open door. William has forgotten the egg! and he fell to thinking of his hunger that would not now be satisfied, and of the

long journey he had made from Lough Carra that day—a journey that seemed to have had no other purpose than that he should enjoy the egg William was to have prepared for him.

That is a deliberately crude caricature. It illustrates Moore's love of repetition, particularly of proper names; his insistence on some material thing that the narrator wishes to keep in the listener's mind; his sliding transitions from speech to thought, and from thought of present hunger to retrospective thought of the journey. It exhibits his familiar devices—for example, his abrupt ending of a cadence on an open monosyllable: "and of the long journey he had made from Lough Carra that *day*—a journey that seemed. . . ." One can hear the narrator's voice rise on "day" and fall naturally as the story continues.

All these mannerisms are the mannerisms of speech—ridiculous in the passage I have invented but giving to Moore's own narrative a disciplined fluency that belongs to a new voice in literature. Consider first his treatment of dialogue and the means he discovered to preserve at once an impression of natural speech and the continuity of a prose that would have been broken by photographic naturalism. Abélard

has been likening the whiteness of Héloïse to the whiteness of summer:

But my summer is not yet come, Abélard, she said; I am but the month of April. Call me not the month of March, for this is a cold month, and I am not cold. A fair month indeed, he answered, is the month of April, one not to be despised, though the month of May is a better month, and the month of June is—Well, June is a month for the Gods. But thy June, Héloïse, is many months distant, and waiting for it shall be my joy. Wilt grow tired of waiting? she asked. Tired of waiting? How little thou knowest yet about love. A true love never tires or wanes, Héloïse, but is with us always, like our blood, like our breath.

In this passage there are seven sentences. Each sentence, without exception, hands on a key-word to be repeated in its successor, precisely as each stanza of *terza rima* hands on a rhyme. The first sentence lays an emphasis on “month”. The second repeats it twice, and produces an internal echo by a double use of the word “cold”. The third sentence has the word “month” no less than six times, and another internal echo on the word “June”. The fourth sentence repeats “June”, and introduces a new word, “waiting”, with a final muffled echo of “month”. The fifth



sentence repeats "waiting"; the sixth echoes it interrogatively, and strikes the new word "love", to which the last sentence instantly replies. By this means was Moore's dialogue bound together, his repetitions and his vowel-sounds linking his prose as rhyme links a sonnet. The significance of his prose escapes us unless we observe that the purpose of such elaboration was not decorative but structural. He was not making pleasant sounds because they pleased his ear; he was binding dialogue, as an architect binds into unity the component parts of his design.

Consider next a descriptive passage in which narrative and speech are interwoven as they have never before been interwoven on the printed page, but as they might be by some story-teller to the gods.

Abélard did not feel sure that the by-path might not be missed, but to hear the road explained out again would be merely a waste of time, and so they hastened towards the forest in a sort of half-knowledge of the way, allowing the horses to trot a little, thinking that they might draw rein when they passed through the fringe of birch-trees that encircled with their pallor the great district of pines that showed in black masses over against Etampes. Now we are well within the forest, Abélard said, as much in the forest

as if we were in the middle of it; and he asked Héloïse to peep over the undergrowth that lined the rutted path down which they were riding, so that she might see the pines rising up naked and bare some fifty or sixty feet, some straight, some leaning, in endless aisles. Like the spears, Héloïse said, of Crusaders going into battle; and how penetrating is the smell of the resin. But the pines were in patches only, and the forest passed quickly into rocky hillsides overgrown with oak and beech. . . .

The passage might be criticized by precisians. "A sort of half-knowledge of the way" would not have eluded Pater, but Moore allowed it, wishing by its momentary looseness to maintain the pliability of speech.

## § XI

I HAVE discussed his style in detail, sacrificing with reluctance an analysis of his work's content, because to analyse even a chapter of *Hail and Farewell* would be to let loose all the fiercest tongues in Ireland and to touch *The Brook Kerith* is to be plunged into controversy artistically irrelevant. I wanted to show how Moore subdued Amico Moorini; how he taught himself to be a writer and

what kind of writer he taught himself to be; and in what sense it is true to say that he gave liberty as well as discipline to the English novel. Great though his influence has already been upon a few writers whose struggle with the difficulties of their craft has opened their eyes to his achievement, his full power lies, I believe, in the future, when the personal controversies that surround his name are dead and the world has had time to re-discover, as it will unless story-telling die, that lucidity is a virtue. Then it will be understood what were the services to art of this man whose house in Ebury-street is become a shop. A card stands in the bow-window, advertising the goods for sale and informing the passer-by that this was the house of the late George Moore. In that room, another friend and I saw him for the last time. It was a winter's morning. A light blind was across the window; the dining-table had been moved; George Moore lay in the middle of the room under the blaze of an electric chandelier. He spoke first of his illness and suffering, a subject of conversation rare in him. Then, rousing himself, he said with an exaltation yet more rare: "Now let us turn from things of the flesh and talk of things of the spirit", and he began to tell us of the book he was then writing and hoped to

finish, *A Communication to My Friends*, finding in it an occasion to speak of his early life and his struggle with the circulating libraries. He turned from this to general defence of an artist's freedom. Humour, irony, indignation, anecdote, poured from him. We were his guests; he exhausted himself to entertain and hold us, having then—as always except when Amico Moorini showed his head—an ancient and elaborate courtesy.

When it was time to leave him and we stood at the door, he cried out: "Come again! Come separately or come together—but come. All day I lie here alone. All day alone." But except when his work itself fought within him, he was not an unhappy man. He was lonely, but reconciled to loneliness by long use and a fanatical desire for independence. He was a single-minded artist, and no one who is that can be altogether unhappy or without armour. His aim, and his achievement, was a constructive simplification of prose narrative. "Ingres and Antiquity", he said, "alone knew how to simplify", and it may well serve as his epitaph that, by infinite labour, he taught himself their lesson and applied it to the English novel.

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